

## PARSIMONY AND PAUPERISM: POOR RELIEF IN ENGLAND, SCOTLAND AND WALES IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY-TWENTIETH CENTURIES\*

Bernard Harris, School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Strathclyde.

Email: [bernard.harris@strath.ac.uk](mailto:bernard.harris@strath.ac.uk).

### *Abstract*

As the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws noted in 1909, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 and the Poor Law (Scotland) Act of 1845 sprang from rather different motives. Whereas the first Act aimed to restrict the provision of poor relief, the second was designed to enhance it. However, despite these aims, it is generally accepted that Scotland's Poor Law continued to relieve a smaller proportion of its population and to spend less money on them. This paper revisits the evidence on which these claims are based. Although the gap between the two Poor Laws was less than previously supposed, it was nevertheless substantial. The paper also explores the links between the size of Scottish parishes and welfare spending, and demonstrates that the main reasons for the persistence of the spending gap were related to different levels of investment in poorhouses and workhouses, and support for the elderly.

### *Keywords*

Poor relief; poor laws; poorhouses; workhouses; Scotland; England and Wales.

---

\* I should like to thank the Editor of this journal, two anonymous referees and Christopher Deeming for helpful comments.

As Peter Jones has recently argued, historians of the Scottish and Anglo-Welsh Poor Laws have often tended to work in isolation.<sup>1</sup> However, there is an increasing need for a more comparative approach to gain a better understanding of the varieties of welfare provision across the UK. This has been underlined by recent efforts to grant Scotland greater power over the administration of social security in the wake of the 2014 Independence Referendum.<sup>2</sup>

In her classic account of the history of the Old Poor Law in Scotland, Rosalind Mitchison argued that ‘a relief system has to have two aspects. One is to arrange for the support of those in need on some local or central base. The other is to control who are to be the recipients, to decide on the qualification which will define the poor’.<sup>3</sup> In England and Wales, the architecture of the Old Poor Law developed during the course of the sixteenth century, but a key role was played by the Vagabonds Act of 1572. This Act not only included provisions for the ‘grievous whipping’ and branding of ‘rogues, vagabonds ... [and] sturdy beggars’, but also instructed Justices of the peace to make suitable provision for the ‘aged, impotent and poor’.<sup>4</sup> The Scottish Poor Law Act of 1574 imposed fines on those who supported the ‘badgeless’ or unlicensed poor but also offered support for ‘crippled, sick, impotent and weak folk, and those under fourteen years and over seventy who were unable to maintain themselves except by begging’.<sup>5</sup> However, although both Poor Laws included provisions for the raising of local taxes, or rates, to support the

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Jones, ‘The New Poor Laws in Scotland, England and Wales: comparative perspectives’, *Local Population Studies*, 99 (2017), pp. 31–41.

<sup>2</sup> For further details, see <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/> (accessed 7/11/18).

<sup>3</sup> R. Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law in Scotland: the experience of poverty, 1574-1845* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *An Act for the punishment of vagabonds, and for relief of the poor and impotent, 1572*, sections II, XVI.

<sup>5</sup> R. Cage, *The Scottish Poor Law, 1745-1845*, (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 4. The original Act was amended in 1579 and only finally repealed in 1906 (A. Cormack, *Poor relief in Scotland: an outline of the growth and administration of the Poor Laws in Scotland, from the Middle Ages to the present day* (Aberdeen, 1923), p. 36).

poor, only the English authorities had the means to enforce this. The two Poor Laws also differed in relation to the range of people they could support. English and Welsh parishes ‘were ordered to provide work and work materials for those needing employment’, whereas Scottish parishes were not.<sup>6</sup>

The two Poor Laws continued to attract debate throughout the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In England and Wales, there was mounting concern over the perceived cost of the Poor Law and a growing campaign either to reform it or abolish it altogether.<sup>7</sup> In Scotland, similar sentiments were expressed by the Evangelical cleric, Thomas Chalmers, who argued that the provision of compulsory relief undermined self-reliance, reduced wages and discouraged the ‘unforced sympathies of our nature’ on which a proper system of Christian charity should be based.<sup>8</sup> However, other voices expressed a contrary view. The medical reformer, William Alison, argued that ‘the Scotch system of neglect or practical disobedience of the law’ meant that ‘the pressure of population on subsistence is ... greater ... and more destructive of human life ... than ... in any of those European countries where the relief of destitution is invested with the authority, and administered with the uniformity, of law’.<sup>9</sup>

Many of the issues raised in these debates came to a head during the period of poor law reform in the 1830s and 1840s. In England and Wales, the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 was framed by a perceived need to control the ‘abuses’ associated with the administration of poor relief and to deter able-bodied people

---

<sup>6</sup> Mitchison, *The Old Poor in Scotland*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> B. Harris, ‘Charity and poor relief in England and Wales, circa 1750–1914’, in B. Harris and P. Bridgen, eds., *Charity and mutual aid in Europe and North America since 1800* (New York, 2007), pp. 19–42 (see esp. pp. 20–3).

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. PP 1830 (654) vii, 451, *Second report of evidence from the Select Committee on the State of the Poor in Ireland*, pp. 279–339; and T. Chalmers, *The Christian and civic economy of large towns* (New York, 1900), p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> W.P. Alison, ‘Illustrations of the practical operation of the Scottish system of management of the poor’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 3, 3 (1840), pp. 211–57, at pp. 212–3.

from asserting their right to relief.<sup>10</sup> The Poor Law (Scotland) Act of 1845 was designed to reform the financial basis of the Scottish Poor Law and improve the quality of provision.<sup>11</sup> However, despite these differences, many of the supporters of the Scottish Act hoped that it would help to bring the two systems much closer together.<sup>12</sup>

The new Act introduced a number of major changes into Scottish Poor Law administration, including the appointment of local inspectors and the establishment of a new central body, the Board of Supervision, with the power to oversee local provision.<sup>13</sup> It tried to encourage individual parishes to form Combinations in order to secure improvements in administration. It reinforced the parishes' power to levy a compulsory tax, or assessment, to fund poor relief. However, it also reiterated the principle that 'nothing herein contained shall ... confer a right to demand relief on able-bodied persons out of employment'.<sup>14</sup>

Although there were many similarities between the two Acts, the two Poor Laws continued to differ in significant respects. One of the consequences was that Scotland's Poor Law continued to relieve a smaller proportion of its population and spent less money on them. Crowther argued that the primary reason for this was the failure to reform the system of parochial administration. Although the Act had encouraged individual parishes to form Combinations, the vast majority declined to

---

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. B. Harris, *The origins of the British welfare state: society, state and social welfare in England and Wales, 1800-1945* (Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 45–9.

<sup>11</sup> PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, pp. 31–2.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law in Scotland*, p. 175.

<sup>13</sup> In 1867, the Board of Supervision acquired responsibility for the oversight of public health provision in Scotland and in 1894 it was superseded by the Local Government Board for Scotland (see I. Levitt, *Government and social conditions in Scotland, 1845-1919* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. xi–xxiii). For a fuller account of the Board's creation, see D. Gladstone, 'The New Poor Law in Scotland: the administrative reorganisation of the first quinquennium', *Social Policy and Administration*, 9, 2 (1975), pp. 115–27. For the Board's impact on the provision of medical relief, see S. Blackden, 'The Board of Supervision and the Scottish parochial medical service', *Medical History*, 30, 2 (1986), pp. 145–72.

<sup>14</sup> 8 & 9 Vict. C. 83, Poor Law (Scotland) Act, sections 2, 9, 33, 68.

do so. This meant that they continued to serve very small populations and Crowther argued that they lacked the resources needed for more generous provision.<sup>15</sup> She also recognised that some of the differences between the two Poor Laws were related to geography, although the extent should not be exaggerated. In 1891, Scotland possessed less than one-seventh of the population of England and Wales, but covered the equivalent of more than half its area.<sup>16</sup> Many Scottish parishes were particularly isolated, and travel both within parishes and between adjacent parishes could be challenging.<sup>17</sup>

Crowther based her analysis on a comparison of recorded rates of pauperism and poor law expenditure in Scotland and England and Wales between 1860/64 and 1900/04. She showed that Scotland relieved a smaller proportion of its population and spent less money per head on the provision of poor relief throughout the period, but she also argued that the gap ‘appeared to be widening at the end of the nineteenth century’.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Paterson argued that, after 1894, ‘relief provisions ... became more uniform and many English features were introduced, although the system retained some Scottish characteristics’.<sup>19</sup>

Crowther’s emphasis on the comparative parsimony of the Scottish Poor Law also contrasts with more recent arguments about the existence of a distinctive

---

<sup>15</sup> M.A. Crowther, ‘Poverty, health and welfare’, in W.H. Fraser and R.J. Morris, eds., *People and society in Scotland. II. 1830-1914* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 265–89 (at pp. 269–70).

<sup>16</sup> In 1891, the population of Scotland was 4,025,647 million and it covered an area of 19,459,725 acres. The population of England and Wales was 29,002,525, spread over an area of 37,317,885 acres. See PP 1893–94 C. 7222 cvi, 629, *Census of England and Wales, Vol IV: General Report, with Summary Tables and Appendices*, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> Crowther, ‘Poverty, health and welfare’, p. 274.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269. Crowther’s calculations appear to have underpinned Devine’s claim that ‘the annual cost of relieving paupers per head of population in Scotland was a full 50 per cent lower than in England’ (T. Devine, *The Scottish nation: a modern history* [Harmondsworth, 2012], p. 343), although no reference was provided. When Gordon Brown repeated this claim in G. Brown, *My Scotland, our Britain: a future worth sharing* (London, 2014), p. 205, he attributed the original quotation to Stana Nenadic (*ibid.*, p. 345, note 1).

<sup>19</sup> A. Paterson, ‘The Poor Law in nineteenth-century Scotland’, in D. Fraser, ed., *The New Poor Law in the nineteenth century* (Basingstoke, 1976), pp. 171–93, at p. 183.

Scottish approach to social welfare. Smith argued that there were ‘particular historical strands of thought that have shaped how social welfare has developed in Scotland’ and that this was one of the main justifications for Scottish independence.<sup>20</sup> This argument has also been reflected in many of the pro-independence arguments advanced by the Scottish National Party since 2014.<sup>21</sup> Unionists have responded by arguing that ‘the creation of shared social and economic rights across the four home nations’ was ‘one of the crowning Scottish achievements of the last three hundred years’ and that Scotland’s interests are best served by remaining within the UK’s ‘sharing Union’.<sup>22</sup> Crowther herself argued that, if there was any truth in the claim that Scots had become too reliant on government services, ‘then the explanation may lie in the excessive burdens placed on small communities in the nineteenth century – burdens which many were happy to hand over to the state’.<sup>23</sup>

Crowther’s claim that the Scots were ‘meaner than the English in their treatment of paupers’<sup>24</sup> was based on a relatively limited range of Scottish and Anglo-Welsh statistics. This paper examines a wider range of statistics over a slightly longer period. The first section uses information published by the Board of Supervision and the Scottish Local Government Board to reconstruct the statistical history of Scottish poor relief between 1845 and 1914. It then compares these statistics with the equivalent data for England and Wales. The third section identifies the main groups of paupers and the fourth section explores the relationship between

---

<sup>20</sup> M. Smith, ‘The argument in support of Scottish independence’, *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, 13, 2 (2014), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> G. Mooney and G. Scott, ‘Welfare, equality and social justice: Scottish independence and the dominant imaginings of the “new” Scotland’, *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 10, 3 (2016), pp. 239–51.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, *My Scotland, our Britain*, pp. 201–2. For a slightly fuller discussion of the relationship between the welfare state and Scottish Unionism, see I. MacLean, ‘Challenging the Union’, in T. M. Devine and J. Wormald, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of modern Scottish history* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 635–51, at pp. 638–9.

<sup>23</sup> Crowther, ‘Poverty, health and welfare’, p. 287.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

pauperism and the size of Scottish parishes. The final sections examine the role of institutions within the two Poor Laws and the specific issue of pauperism at higher ages.

# I

Before 1845 the Scottish Poor Law was largely dependent on charitable donations and there was no central body to provide overall supervision. This almost inevitably meant that the statistics of poor relief were especially patchy. As the Board of Supervision explained in 1847, ‘the Registers of the Poor ... had, for the most part, been kept irregularly or imperfectly ... [and] the accounts of expenditure ... were not infrequently mixed up with other items of parochial expenditure’.<sup>25</sup>

Loch used Sinclair’s *Statistical Account of Scotland* and an enquiry launched by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to estimate numbers of paupers and levels of expenditure during the periods 1791–8 and 1808–16. He then compared the results with English and Welsh figures for 1802–3 and 1815. After making allowances for the difference between ‘occasional’ and ‘permanent’ relief, he concluded that the rate of pauperism in Scotland was approximately half the rate in England and Wales but he also conceded that ‘it is difficult to compare the English and Scottish figures ... with certainty’. One problem was that the English figures included wives, whereas the Scottish figures did not. As Loch himself admitted, ‘this would reduce the difference between the English and Scottish figures’.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> PP 1847 (767) xxvii, 405, *First Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor in Scotland*, p. xxii.

<sup>26</sup> C.S. Loch, ‘Poor relief in Scotland: its statistics and development’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 61, 2 (1898), 271–370, at pp. 269–72.

The Old Poor Law in Scotland distinguished three groups of paupers. The largest group consisted of the enrolled or permanent poor who were expected to remain dependent on the parish for the remainder of their lives. The second group, known as the occasional poor, contained those who were expected to become independent at some point in the future. This group included widows with young children who would become independent once they were older. The third group comprised those who might have received temporary support before moving elsewhere. In 1847, the Board instructed its Inspectors to register all those who were relieved by order of the parochial board, regardless of whether they would previously have been defined as either enrolled or occasional. It also created a new category of casual paupers, who were relieved by order of the Inspectors before the parochial board had had the opportunity to consider their cases.<sup>27</sup>

The Board introduced a further change in 1859. It had previously estimated the number of people receiving relief during the course of the year. It now began to record the number who received relief on 14 May in each year and these figures were recorded annually until 1896, when the recently-created Local Government Board for Scotland changed the census day to 15 May.<sup>28</sup> The Board also recorded figures for 1 January and 14 August from 1870 to 1883, and for 15 January and 15 September from 1896 onwards.<sup>29</sup> In 1909, the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws compared the figures for January, May and September and concluded that May's figures were close to the average of the other two.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> PP 1847–8 (906) xxxii, 113, *Second Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor in Scotland*, p. xiv.

<sup>28</sup> PP 1910 Cd. 4978 xlvii, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume VI. Minutes of Evidence (95 to 110<sup>th</sup> days and 139<sup>th</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> days) with Appendix*, p. 864.

<sup>29</sup> PP 1903 Cd. 1521 xxvi, 1, *Eighth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland*, p. x.

<sup>30</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 3.



It is also important to look at the number of paupers listed under different headings. The Board continued to distinguish the registered poor from the casual poor until the early-1890s. However, it also distinguished between paupers and their dependants throughout the period and, from 1868 onwards, it published an additional table with separate numbers of indoor paupers, outdoor paupers and pauper lunatics. We can therefore compile a more detailed picture of changes in the number of people receiving different kinds of relief during the second half of the nineteenth century.

We can also build up a more consistent picture of changes in poor law expenditure during this period. The Board published what it regarded as a consistent series of annual totals from 1847 onwards, but these figures were only broken down into discrete categories after 1883. Between 1884 and 1893, the Board published separate figures showing expenditure on the maintenance of both indoor and outdoor paupers and pauper lunatics, and between 1894 and 1905 the Board of Supervision and the Local Government Board also provided separate figures for medical relief, management, legal costs, debt repayment, buildings, election expenses and 'miscellaneous' costs. After 1906, the Local Government Board continued to publish separate figures showing expenditure on the maintenance of outdoor paupers and pauper lunatics, but the figures for indoor paupers now included building costs and the format of the general summaries was amended also.

The results of this exercise are summarised in the following Tables. Table 1 shows changes in the number of Scottish paupers between 1859 and 1914, and in the numbers of indoor paupers, outdoor paupers and pauper lunatics from 1868. The overall number of paupers reached a peak of 136,236 in 1868 and then fell between 1868 and 1892. This was followed by a modest increase between 1892 and 1914. However, there were also significant changes in the numbers of paupers

relieved under different headings. The number of outdoor paupers fell by more than 50,000 between 1868 and 1892; it then rose slowly before declining from 1910 onwards. The number of indoor paupers also declined after 1868, but numbers fluctuated during the 1870s and 1880s before starting to increase more rapidly from the mid-1890s. Finally, the number of pauper lunatics increased steadily throughout the period. Some of this increase may have been statistical, since the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws believed that ‘many persons who would not formerly have been classed as lunatics [are] now being included under that head’.<sup>31</sup>

*Table 1. Pauperism in Scotland, 1859-1914*

	Indoor	Outdoor	Lunatics	All		Indoor	Outdoor	Lunatics	All
1859	–	–	–	122,013	1887	9,095	77,889	9,552	96,536
1860	–	–	–	120,816	1888	8,863	77,531	9,832	96,226
1861	–	–	–	124,131	1889	8,471	76,295	10,070	94,836
1862	–	–	–	126,319	1890	8,182	74,272	10,370	92,824
1863	–	–	–	127,560	1891	8,160	72,294	10,609	91,063
1864	7,257	115,237	5,220	127,714	1892	8,527	71,487	10,778	90,792
1865	7,348	115,637	5,358	128,343	1893	8,824	72,178	11,002	92,004
1866	7,070	113,513	5,459	126,042	1894	9,212	73,108	11,362	93,682
1867	7,929	114,806	5,626	128,361	1895	9,083	75,234	11,551	95,868
1868	8,794	121,652	5,790	136,236	1896	9,569	76,494	11,939	98,002
1869	8,346	121,657	6,062	136,065	1897	9,908	77,313	12,282	99,503
1870	7,928	118,311	6,227	132,466	1898	10,032	76,909	12,637	99,578
1871	7,749	115,160	6,348	129,257	1899	9,965	75,004	12,978	97,947
1872	7,402	108,954	6,381	122,737	1900	9,868	75,982	13,166	99,016
1873	7,898	101,736	6,473	116,107	1901	10,306	75,126	13,596	99,028
1874	7,769	95,919	6,551	110,239	1902	10,865	76,134	13,849	100,848
1875	7,673	91,195	6,737	105,605	1903	11,711	77,112	14,193	103,016
1876	7,586	88,096	6,976	102,658	1904	12,827	78,413	14,384	105,624
1877	8,046	85,334	7,260	100,640	1905	13,255	80,772	14,616	108,643
1878	8,763	83,032	7,603	99,398	1906	13,187	81,216	14,831	109,234
1879	9,140	85,998	7,761	102,899	1907	13,423	79,447	15,031	107,901
1880	9,296	85,793	8,097	103,186	1908	14,574	81,389	15,242	111,205
1881	9,040	84,918	8,348	102,306	1909	14,925	82,787	15,547	113,259
1882	8,964	81,660	8,717	99,341	1910	14,645	83,634	15,733	114,012
1883	8,722	79,494	8,881	97,097	1911	13,761	76,426	16,064	106,251
1884	9,041	76,567	9,034	94,642	1912	13,678	77,459	16,361	107,498
1885	9,007	77,355	9,154	95,516	1913	13,240	73,953	16,381	103,574
1886	9,495	78,575	9,434	97,504	1914	13,015	74,438	16,671	104,124

Notes. As indicated in the text, the Board of Supervision published tables showing the number of indoor, outdoor and lunatic paupers from 1868 onwards. However, additional information regarding the numbers of indoor paupers and pauper lunatics has been derived from the reports for 1864–7.

Sources: *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision, 1859–1894; *Annual Reports* of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1895–1914.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

The second table shows changes in poor law expenditure from 1847 onwards. The detailed figures cover the period between 1884/5 and 1905/6. This period saw increases in the amounts of money spent on both indoor and outdoor paupers but the greatest increases were associated with expenditure on pauper lunatics. It is also important to note that the totals given in the *Annual Reports* only began to include expenditure on debt repayment, buildings, election expenses and other miscellaneous expenditure from 1894/5. This meant that the annual figures which the Board published in its later reports were not strictly comparable with the earlier figures. As a result, the current table also includes calculations showing the total sums expended on maintenance, medical relief, poor law management and legal costs.

*Table 2. Poor law expenditure in Scotland, 1847-1914*

Maintenance								
	Indoor	Outdoor	Lunatic poor (indoor & outdoor)	Total (Maintenance)	Medical relief + Management + Law	Total (Maintenance + Medical relief + Management + Law)	Debt repayment + Buildings + Election expenses + Miscellaneous	Total (All)
1846/1847	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	433,915
1847/1848	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	533,362
1848/1849	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	562,268
1849/1850	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	534,353
1850/1851	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	513,329
1851/1852	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	514,288
1852/1853	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	522,376
1853/1854	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	546,819
1854/1855	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	584,823
1855/1856	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	602,822
1856/1857	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	599,205
1857/1858	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	622,634
1858/1859	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	641,115
1859/1860	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	643,303
1860/1861	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	657,953
1861/1862	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	680,699
1862/1863	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	704,846
1863/1864	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	723,144
1864/1865	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	731,855
1865/1866	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	739,315
1866/1867	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	757,212
1867/1868	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	795,483
1868/1869	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	821,184
1869/1870	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	818,390
1870/1871	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	810,456
1871/1872	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	809,690
1872/1873	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	801,895
1873/1874	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	799,130
1874/1875	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	804,916

Maintenance								
	Indoor	Outdoor	Lunatic poor (indoor & outdoor)	Total (Maintenance)	Medical relief + Management + Law	Total (Maintenance + Medical relief + Management + Law)	Debt repayment + Buildings + Election expenses + Miscellaneous	Total (All)
1875/1876	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	797,800
1876/1877	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	806,308
1877/1878	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	824,251
1878/1879	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	831,425
1879/1880	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	849,064
1880/1881	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	853,348
1881/1882	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	844,781
1882/1883	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	834,657
1883/1884	73,406	392,617	199,970	665,993	166,122	832,115	-	832,115
1884/1885	73,372	389,728	201,112	664,212	166,429	830,641	-	830,641
1885/1886	73,728	390,286	206,398	670,412	167,623	838,035	-	838,035
1886/1887	64,391	402,467	208,200	675,058	168,232	843,290	-	843,290
1887/1888	64,000	403,802	207,157	674,959	169,871	844,830	-	844,830
1888/1889	63,765	398,504	211,386	673,655	169,071	842,726	-	842,726
1889/1890	64,371	385,196	216,552	666,119	175,833	841,952	-	841,952
1890/1891	67,392	372,767	223,351	663,510	178,135	841,645	-	841,645
1891/1892	70,273	388,438	230,344	689,055	182,251	871,306	-	871,306
1892/1893	72,340	382,765	233,681	688,786	185,161	873,947	-	873,947
1893/1894	74,289	393,899	238,725	706,913	187,587	894,500	62,315	956,815
1894/1895	75,516	407,048	247,537	730,101	196,658	926,759	67,255	994,014
1895/1896	75,963	413,149	253,051	742,163	199,874	942,037	95,790	1,037,827
1896/1897	78,115	436,245	261,498	775,858	208,628	984,486	73,253	1,057,739
1897/1898	80,298	442,406	270,230	792,934	209,957	1,002,891	83,059	1,085,950
1898/1899	84,197	451,944	283,045	819,186	209,207	1,028,393	74,951	1,103,344
1899/1900	87,161	459,259	297,728	844,148	212,816	1,056,964	52,655	1,109,619
1900/1901	96,861	468,170	311,615	876,646	216,618	1,093,264	62,099	1,155,363
1901/1902	98,710	480,190	323,429	902,329	222,480	1,124,809	68,842	1,193,651
1902/1903	106,714	495,404	330,907	933,025	230,867	1,163,892	71,161	1,235,053
1903/1904	121,349	514,477	336,253	972,079	240,731	1,212,810	87,933	1,300,743
1904/1905	136,155	540,548	350,707	1,027,410	258,311	1,285,721	116,633	1,402,354
1905/1906	314,474	554,270	396,823	-	-	-	-	1,406,489
1906/1907	325,907	559,532	395,663	-	-	-	-	1,422,375
1907/1908	353,048	569,102	404,371	-	-	-	-	1,481,725
1908/1909	362,444	593,459	407,871	-	-	-	-	1,512,414
1909/1910	371,558	613,122	412,618	-	-	-	-	1,551,084
1910/1911	374,482	606,531	421,159	-	-	-	-	1,565,041
1911/1912	376,732	583,518	433,069	-	-	-	-	1,545,720
1912/1913	389,532	591,126	439,927	-	-	-	-	1,576,116
1913/1914	394,114	594,035	451,946	-	-	-	-	1,609,358

Notes. As explained in the text, the figures for the indoor poor from 1905/6 onwards include associated building costs.

Sources: *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision, 1859–1894; *Annual Reports* of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1895–1914.

## II

Crowther's analysis of Scotland's poor law statistics was based on a table published by the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws in 1909.<sup>32</sup> The table showed the number of paupers receiving relief on either 14 May or 15 May in successive years

<sup>32</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume VI*, p. 864.

between 1859 and 1906 but the figures failed to differentiate between indoor and outdoor paupers, or pauper lunatics.

It is slightly more difficult to ascertain the source of Crowther's expenditure figures. Her footnote suggested that the data were obtained from the Scottish Local Government Board's *Annual Report* for 1913, but the relevant page only contained information about the numbers of paupers and dependants and, although financial information was provided elsewhere in the *Report*, it did not cover the whole of Crowther's period.<sup>33</sup> However, we can reconstruct the relevant section of Crowther's table using the information in Table 2, and the two sets of figures are compared in Table 3.

In order to compare levels of pauperism in Scotland with the equivalent figures for England and Wales, Crowther used Williams' data.<sup>34</sup> However, Williams combined the figures for pauper lunatics and casual paupers into a single category. It has therefore been necessary to recalculate Williams' figures using additional information from the *Annual Reports* of the Poor Law Board (for 1847–71) and the Local Government Board for England and Wales from 1871 onwards. These figures have then been combined with Williams' own data on poor law expenditure to re-estimate levels of expenditure on different sections of the Anglo-Welsh population.

It is also necessary to try to ensure that the same elements are being included. The Scottish totals excluded expenditure on debt repayment, buildings, election expenses and other miscellaneous items before 1894. However, many of these items were included in Williams' overall figures. These items have therefore been removed from his totals when performing the current calculations.

---

<sup>33</sup> PP 1914 Cd.7327 xl, 1, *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1913*, pp. xvii, xxvi.

<sup>34</sup> K. Williams, *From pauperism to poverty* (London, 1981).

The results of this exercise are shown in Table 3. The first four columns are derived from Crowther's tables and are based on the recorded levels of pauperism and expenditure per head of population in both Scotland and England and Wales between 1860/64 and 1900/04.<sup>35</sup> The second four columns enable us to compare these figures with the figures compiled for this paper. The figures for Scotland differ slightly because the current figures have been weighted to take account of changes in the size of the population within each quinquennium, but the figures for England and Wales are significantly different. This is because of the exclusion of figures which were not included in the Scottish data. This significantly reduces the disparity between spending in Scotland and spending in England and Wales, without removing it entirely.

*Table 3. The incidence and cost of pauperism in Scotland and England and Wales, 1860-1914*

	Crowther (1990)				Current paper			
	Paupers per 1000 population		Annual cost per head of population (d)		Paupers per 1000 population		Annual cost per head of population (d)	
	Scotland	England & Wales	Scotland	England & Wales	Scotland	England & Wales	Scotland	England & Wales
1860-64	39.8	47.0	52	71	40.49	45.87	52.89	66.29
1865-69	40.0	44.8	56	78	40.42	44.52	56.95	70.27
1870-74	35.6	41.6	56	81	35.94	41.73	57.05	69.69
1875-79	28.4	30.4	53	73	28.52	30.90	54.43	61.32
1880-84	26.0	30.0	53	75	26.40	30.20	53.76	61.77
1885-89	24.6	28.4	51	71	24.59	28.29	51.56	59.10
1890-94	22.6	25.8	50	73	22.71	26.29	51.18	60.83
1895-99	22.6	25.8	53	83	22.87	26.32	54.61	66.57
1900-04	22.2	24.2	59	89	22.57	24.60	60.31	73.84
1905-09	-	-	-	-	23.69	25.98	66.43	79.06
1910-14	-	-	-	-	22.60	22.79	-	77.45

Sources: Crowther, 'Poverty, health and welfare', p. 269 and text. For Scottish population figures, see *Annual Reports of the Board of Supervision and the Local Government Board for Scotland*. For English and Welsh population figures, see *Annual Reports of the Poor Law Commission, the Poor Law Board and the Local Government Board*.

In order to understand why Scotland experienced lower rates of pauperism and per capita spending on poor relief, it is therefore necessary to look more closely at the different categories of pauper and the different categories of spending. Table 4

<sup>35</sup> Crowther's original table included data for 1860/64, 1865/69, 1870/74, 1875/79, 1880/84, 1885/89, 1890/95, 1895/99 and 1900/05. It is assumed that the references to 1890/95 and 1900/05 were misprints.

shows that levels of outdoor relief fell markedly in both Scotland and England and Wales during the ‘crusade against outdoor relief’ of the 1870s and continued to fall under both Poor Laws during the 1880s and 1890s. However, although the Scottish figures stabilised during the late-1890s and early-1900s, the Anglo-Welsh figures continued to fall. This meant that although the two Poor Laws experienced similar levels of outdoor pauperism throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, the Scottish figures exceeded the Anglo-Welsh figures during the early years of the twentieth century.

*Table 4. Pauperism in Scotland and England and Wales, by category, 1860-1914*

Paupers and pauper lunatics per 1000 population									
	Scotland				England and Wales				
	Indoor	Outdoor	Insane	Total	Indoor	Outdoor	Insane	Casuals	Total
1860-64	–	–	–	40.49	5.67	38.38	1.68	0.14	45.87
1865-69	2.44	36.24	1.75	40.42	5.90	36.48	1.90	0.24	44.52
1870-74	2.28	31.78	1.88	35.94	5.86	33.53	2.15	0.18	41.73
1875-79	2.30	24.19	2.03	28.52	5.50	22.93	2.32	0.15	30.90
1880-84	2.40	21.71	2.29	26.40	6.15	21.37	2.46	0.22	30.20
1885-89	2.30	19.83	2.46	24.59	5.96	19.61	2.53	0.19	28.29
1890-94	2.12	17.92	2.67	22.71	5.78	17.64	2.68	0.21	26.29
1895-99	2.26	17.75	2.86	22.87	6.04	17.20	2.84	0.23	26.32
1900-04	2.47	17.02	3.08	22.57	6.04	15.35	3.01	0.20	24.60
1905-09	2.99	17.46	3.24	23.69	6.79	15.71	3.22	0.25	25.98
1910-14	2.88	16.28	3.43	22.60	6.88	12.36	3.31	0.24	22.79

Sources: See Table 3.

The table also sheds light on the figures for indoor relief and lunacy. The Royal Commission on the Poor Laws suspected that levels of pauper lunacy in Scotland had been artificially inflated but the overall rates were very similar to the Anglo-Welsh figures. Consequently, the main cause of disparities in the overall rates of pauperism was the difference in the proportions receiving indoor relief. Although the figures for both countries were relatively low, Scots were still much less likely to receive indoor relief than their southern neighbours.

We can also examine differences in the amounts of money being spent in relation to different categories of pauper. Table 5 suggests that Scotland spent

consistently more, per head of population, on the support of outdoor paupers and slightly more on the support of pauper lunatics. However, it spent a great deal less on the support of the indoor poor. Comparing Tables 4 and 5, we can see that this reflected the fact that Scotland not only accommodated a much smaller proportion of the population in poorhouses than England and Wales accommodated in workhouses, but also spent less money on those who were accommodated. The lack of spending on the provision of indoor relief was the primary cause of the overall difference in spending between the two systems.

Further evidence of differences in attitudes to the role of indoor relief is provided by the figures for building expenditure. These figures are only available for Scotland from 1894 and for England and Wales from 1900 onwards.<sup>36</sup> The comparison is also complicated by the fact that some building costs were included in the figures for expenditure on indoor relief in Scotland after 1905. However, the overall picture is still fairly clear. During the period between 1900 and 1906, the Scottish poor law authorities spent an average of 1.4d per head of population on buildings, whereas the Anglo-Welsh Boards of Guardians spent an average of 7.3d.<sup>37</sup>

### III

Although the Board of Supervision and the Scottish Local Government Board produced an increasing amount of information, this was often more concerned with administrative categories than the personal or demographic characteristics of those receiving poor relief. However, the Board of Supervision provided a limited amount of information about the number of paupers and dependants throughout the period

---

<sup>36</sup> Williams, *From pauperism to poverty*, p. 171.

<sup>37</sup> For Scotland, annual population totals and expenditure on buildings have been derived from the *Annual Reports* of the Local Government Board for Scotland for the period 1900–05. For England and Wales, see Williams, *From pauperism to poverty*, p. 171.



and, from 1870 onwards, it also distinguished between male and female paupers. The Local Government Board provided more information about the number of recipients over the age of 70 from 1909.

Crowther noted that the Scottish and English statistics were often compiled in slightly different ways.<sup>38</sup> The Scottish authorities published the numbers of people receiving relief on individual days in January, May and September, together with tables showing the May figures for successive years. By contrast, the English and Welsh authorities counted the number of people receiving relief on 1 July and 1 January, and then averaged the two. When it comes to more detailed comparisons, there are three further problems. One problem is that the Scottish returns failed to distinguish children from other groups of dependants. Although the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws argued that ‘the great majority of “dependants” are children’, it also suggested that the proportion of children within the category of dependants had changed over time.<sup>39</sup> The Scottish authorities also classified children as being under the age of fourteen, whereas children in England and Wales were under the age of sixteen. The third problem was that the Scottish figures included the sex of both pauper lunatics and casual paupers, whereas the Anglo-Welsh figures did not differentiate between male and female casual paupers after 1890.

---

<sup>38</sup> Crowther, ‘Poverty, health and welfare’, p. 288.

<sup>39</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 27.

*Table 5. Expenditure under different headings per head of population in Scotland and England and Wales, 1860-1914*

	Scotland (d)							England and Wales (d)					Total (excluding loan charges, building repairs, rates, taxes and insurance, and other expenses)
	Indoor paupers	Outdoor paupers	Pauper lunatics	All	Medical relief	Other Management and legal costs	Total (excluding debt repayment, buildings, election expenses and miscellaneous expenditure)	Indoor paupers	Outdoor paupers	Pauper lunatics	All	Salaries and rations of officers	
1860-64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13.08	39.35	5.81	58.24	8.05	66.29
1865-69	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15.77	38.81	7.12	61.71	8.56	70.27
1870-74	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16.42	35.88	8.15	60.45	9.24	69.69
1875-79	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16.24	26.19	9.20	51.63	9.69	61.32
1880-84	-	-	-	42.48	-	-	-	17.34	23.93	9.98	51.24	10.53	61.77
1885-89	4.17	24.37	12.70	41.23	-	-	-	15.85	21.65	10.09	47.59	11.51	59.10
1890-94	4.13	22.77	13.53	40.42	-	-	-	17.10	19.79	11.28	48.17	12.66	60.83
1895-99	4.41	24.05	14.71	43.16	2.88	8.57	54.61	18.22	21.07	12.93	52.21	14.35	66.57
1900-04	5.45	25.80	17.07	48.32	3.05	8.94	60.31	21.06	21.12	15.45	57.63	16.21	73.84
1905-09	-	-	-	-	3.44	9.90	66.43	22.20	22.70	16.37	61.27	17.78	79.06
1910-14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23.15	17.25	17.37	57.78	19.68	77.45

Sources: *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision and the Local Government Board for Scotland; *Annual Reports* of the Poor Law Board and the Local Government Board for England and Wales; Williams 1981: 167-78.

Despite these caveats, we can still draw some broad conclusions about differences in the relationship between age and sex under the two Poor Laws. Table 6 reinforces the view that Scots were less likely to receive poor relief than people living in England and Wales, but levels of pauperism among children were probably higher. However, adults were less likely to receive relief in Scotland than in England and Wales, and this was especially true of adult males.

The Royal Commission on the Poor Laws commissioned a special census of all those receiving relief in Scotland and England and Wales on 31 March 1906, and it included detailed tables in both its English and Scottish reports. We can combine the information from these reports to obtain a more detailed picture of the relationship between both age and gender and the different types of assistance people received.

Table 7 provides a fuller account of the numbers of individuals receiving poor relief in both jurisdictions at different ages. It reinforces the view that rates of pauperism among children were higher in Scotland than England and Wales, and also shows that Scots were more likely to receive poor relief between the ages of 35 and 44. Although these figures were not broken down by gender, the Commissioners suggested that Scottish authorities adopted a much more liberal approach to the relief of widows with dependent children than their Anglo-Welsh counterparts.<sup>40</sup> However, Scots were much less likely to receive relief at higher ages. The table suggests that only 8.6 per cent of Scots aged 60 or above were in receipt of relief, as opposed to 14.7 per cent of those aged 60 or above south of the border.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 32.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

*Table 6. Child and adult paupers as percentage of the population in Scotland and England and Wales*

	Scotland						England and Wales					
	Estimated average annual population			Paupers as % of population			Estimated average annual population			Paupers as % of population		
	Adults ( $\geq 14$ )		Dependants	Adults ( $\geq 14$ )		Children (<14)	Adults ( $\geq 14$ )		Children (<14)	Adults ( $\geq 14$ )		Children (<14)
	Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female		Male	Female	
1871-1880	1,075,589	1,238,415	1,215,014	1.85	4.00	3.28	7,149,668	7,789,491	9,241,085	2.51	4.71	3.03
1881-1890	1,200,037	1,355,736	1,310,334	1.62	3.11	2.67	8,121,413	8,884,660	10,331,005	2.25	3.80	2.50
1891-1900	1,336,003	1,504,285	1,386,264	1.53	2.78	2.41	9,338,567	10,290,253	10,960,056	2.16	3.41	2.09
1901-1910	1,501,280	1,663,124	1,437,660	1.70	2.71	2.55	10,784,635	11,902,086	11,435,262	2.00	2.99	1.98

Notes. Population figures have been estimated from the census returns for 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901 and 1911. In Scotland, the population aged 10-13 has been calculated as four-fifths of the population aged 10-14. In order to estimate the population aged 0-15 in England and Wales between 1871 and 1900, the population aged 15 has been calculated as one-fifth of the population aged 15-19.

Sources: For population figures, see Census reports for 1871-1911. For pauper statistics, see *Annual Reports* of the Board of Supervision, the Local Government Board for Scotland, and the Local Government Board for England and Wales.

*Table 7. Ages of paupers in Scotland and England and Wales, 31 March 1906*

	Scotland		England and Wales	
	Estimated population in each group	Paupers as % of population	Estimated population in each group	Paupers as % of population
0-13	1,430,332	2.69	10,716,641	2.16
14-24	1,054,167	0.24	6,843,333	0.33
25-34	760,690	0.58	5,786,212	0.66
35-44	570,414	1.45	4,391,053	1.33
45-54	408,253	1.66	3,142,570	1.79
55-59	153,471	2.25	1,154,793	2.60
60-64	139,227	3.91	959,064	6.41
65-74	150,066	9.65	1,123,678	16.30
75-85	58,447	15.79	424,909	27.59
≥85	8,241	19.82	51,205	35.31
Total	4,733,306	2.00	34,593,458	2.36

Sources: PP 1909 Cd. 4499 xxxvii, 1, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, p. 17; PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, Report on Scotland*, p. 6.

The practice of ‘boarding-out’ pauper children was one of the Scottish poor law’s most distinctive characteristics, and Crowther argued that it was one of the main reasons for Scotland’s higher rates of child pauperism. However, it is difficult to judge the extent to which this was so.<sup>42</sup> As the Royal Commission explained, Scottish children were much less likely to be placed in institutions (and especially poorhouses) than their English or Welsh counterparts.<sup>43</sup> However, MacDonald also highlighted the Scottish authorities’ growing enthusiasm for removing children from those described by the Royal Commission as ‘undesirable parents’, and this may have added to overall numbers.<sup>44</sup>

The Royal Commission also published figures showing the numbers of men and women over the age of sixty receiving either indoor or outdoor relief (Table 8). In both Scotland and England and Wales, men were more likely than women to be

<sup>42</sup> Crowther, ‘Poverty, health and welfare’, p. 270.

<sup>43</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 26.

<sup>44</sup> H. MacDonald, ‘Boarding out and the Scottish Poor Law, 1845–1914’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 75, 2 (1996), pp. 197–220, at p. 198; see also Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 27.

receiving indoor relief, but the differences were outweighed by differences in the numbers receiving outdoor relief. However, Scots over the age of sixty were still less likely to receive either indoor or outdoor relief than their English and Welsh counterparts.

As the Royal Commission explained, ‘it is difficult to account for this important feature of the Scottish statistics’.<sup>45</sup> Loch attributed lower rates of old-age pauperism in Scotland to the different attitudes which had existed within the two countries before the New Poor Laws came into operation.<sup>46</sup> He argued that the older generation in Scotland had spent their formative years under a more restrictive regime and that this had left them with a lifelong distaste for welfare provision. The Royal Commission reiterated this view eleven years later.<sup>47</sup> However, the differences may also have been related to a lack of appropriate provision, and especially the comparative absence of institutional support for the most vulnerable. This may help to explain why the disparity between the rate of indoor pauperism in Scotland the rate of indoor pauperism in England and Wales increased with age.

---

<sup>45</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> Loch, ‘Poor relief in Scotland’, pp. 330–1.

<sup>47</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 32.

*Table 8. Gender and pauperism in Scotland and England and Wales at higher ages, 31 March 1906*

Men	Scotland				England and Wales			
	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total
60-64	65,839	1.64	1.10	2.74	441,549	3.87	1.94	5.81
65-74	58,967	3.40	3.86	7.26	495,899	6.93	7.04	13.97
75-84	22,344	3.25	8.44	11.69	176,657	9.72	16.37	26.09
≥85	2,632	2.28	13.03	15.31	18,974	14.00	20.39	34.39
Total	149,918	2.58	3.49	6.07	1,133,079	6.29	6.73	13.02
Women	Scotland				England and Wales			
	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total
60-64	73,387	0.83	4.13	4.96	517,514	1.50	5.42	6.92
65-74	91,099	1.50	9.69	11.19	627,779	3.02	15.11	18.14
75-84	36,103	2.29	16.03	18.32	248,253	5.49	23.17	28.65
≥85	5,609	2.54	19.39	21.93	32,232	10.36	25.49	35.85
Total	206,198	1.43	9.08	8.64	1,425,777	3.07	13.23	16.30
Persons	Scotland				England and Wales			
	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total	Estimated population	Indoor relief	Outdoor relief	Total
60-64	139,227	1.21	2.70	3.91	959,064	2.59	3.82	6.41
65-74	150,066	2.25	7.40	9.65	1,123,678	4.75	11.55	16.30
75-84	58,447	2.66	13.13	15.79	424,909	7.25	20.34	27.59
≥85	8,241	2.46	17.36	19.82	51,205	11.71	23.60	35.31
Total	356,115	1.92	6.73	8.64	2,558,856	4.49	10.35	14.85

Sources: PP 1909 Cd. 4499 xxxvii, 1, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, p. 37; PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, Report on Scotland*, p. 24.

The Royal Commission also compared day-counts in both Scotland and England and Wales with the estimated numbers of people receiving relief at any time during the year. It estimated that the annual total was 1.61 times greater than the day-count in Scotland and 2.15 times greater than the day-count in England and Wales.<sup>48</sup> Although the day-counts imply that the difference between the average rates of pauperism in the two jurisdictions was diminishing, the annual totals suggest that it was still substantial. However, the figures also suggest that the average number of days on which each pauper received relief in Scotland was greater (see Table 9).

<sup>48</sup> PP 1909 Cd. 4499 xxxvii, 1, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, p. 18; Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 4.

*Table 9. Comparison of day-counts and annual pauper totals, Scotland and England and Wales, 1907.*

	Day-count	Annual total	Ratio of annual total to day count	Average number of days during the year on which each pauper received assistance
Scotland	92,870	149,058	1.61	227.41
England and Wales	793,519	1,709,436	2.15	169.43
Great Britain	886,389	1,858,494	2.10	174.08

Notes. The figures for Scotland exclude the 'lunatic poor', and those for England and Wales exclude insane paupers and casuals. The Scottish day-count is based on the number of individuals receiving relief on 15 May 1907, and the annual total is based on the average of the numbers receiving assistance during the years ending 15 May 1907 and 15 May 1908. For England and Wales, the day-count is the average of the day-counts for 1 January 1907 and 1 July 1907, and the annual total is based on the number of individuals receiving assistance during the year ending 30 September 1907.

Sources: PP 1908 Cd. 4142 xxxii, 1, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1907*, pp. vii-viii; PP 1909 Cd. 4499 xxxvii, 1, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress*, p. 18; PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, Report on Scotland*, p. 4.

Unfortunately, we cannot use the Scottish data to break these figures down further. However, the Royal Commission performed a more detailed analysis of the Anglo-Welsh figures. Paupers were likely to receive relief on a smaller number of days if they were under the age of sixty-five, but the average number of 'relief-days' was higher among women and those living in rural areas. It was also greater among those receiving outdoor relief.<sup>49</sup> These figures suggest that at least some of the difference between the average duration of poor relief in Scotland and the average duration of relief in England and Wales was related to the fact that Scotland was a more rural society, with a higher proportion of female paupers and lower levels of indoor relief.

#### IV

One of the main differences between local poor law authorities in Scotland and England and Wales was their size. In 1895, there were 885 poor law parishes in Scotland, serving a combined population of just over four million. Almost thirteen per cent of these parishes contained fewer than 500 inhabitants and nearly 36 per

<sup>49</sup> PP 1911 Cd. 5077 liii, 1, *Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, Appendix Volume XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales*, pp. 557-67.



cent contained fewer than 1000 inhabitants (see Table 10). In 1901, the smallest Poor Law Union in England and Wales contained just over 2000 inhabitants and more than 87 per cent of Unions contained more than 10,000 inhabitants. The average Scottish parish contained 4549 inhabitants; in England and Wales, the average Poor Law Union contained more than 50,000.<sup>50</sup>

*Table 10. Pauperism and poor law expenditure in different-sized parishes, 1894/5*

Population size	No. of parishes	Aggregate population	Paupers (including dependants)		Expenditure (£)					
			N	% of population	Maintenance	Medical relief	Buildings	Debt repayment	Other	Total
<500	114	39,193	777	1.98	7,417	726	109	6	2,446	10,704
500-999	204	151,881	3,864	2.54	33,110	3,506	435	184	8,067	45,292
1000-2499	304	501,598	13,888	2.77	112,811	10,596	1,186	612	23,614	148,819
2500-4999	124	441,436	11,727	2.66	87,863	6,388	1,116	625	19,908	115,900
5000-9999	79	549,821	12,608	2.29	94,069	4,887	1,335	848	20,748	121,887
10,000-19,999	37	499,147	11,266	2.26	85,457	3,855	1,862	1,068	16,341	108,551
20,000-49,999	13	411,813	8,927	2.17	67,021	3,053	3,164	1,681	14,951	89,902
≥50,000	10	1,430,758	32,362	2.26	242,353	15,090	30,889	32,083	56,553	376,968
Total	885	4,025,647	95,419	2.37	730,101	48,101	40,096	37,107	162,628	1,018,023
Population size	No. of parishes	Aggregate population	Paupers (including dependants)		Expenditure per head of population (d)					
			N	%	Maintenance	Medical relief	Buildings	Debt repayment	Other	Total
<500	114	39,193	777	1.98	45.42	4.45	0.67	0.04	14.98	65.55
500-999	204	151,881	3,864	2.54	52.32	5.54	0.69	0.29	12.75	71.57
1000-2499	304	501,598	13,888	2.77	53.98	5.07	0.57	0.29	11.30	71.21
2500-4999	124	441,436	11,727	2.66	47.77	3.47	0.61	0.34	10.82	63.01
5000-9999	79	549,821	12,608	2.29	41.06	2.13	0.58	0.37	9.06	53.20
10,000-19,999	37	499,147	11,266	2.26	41.09	1.85	0.90	0.51	7.86	52.19
20,000-49,999	13	411,813	8,927	2.17	39.06	1.78	1.84	0.98	8.71	52.39
≥50,000	10	1,430,758	32,362	2.26	40.65	2.53	5.18	5.38	9.49	63.23
Total	885	4,025,647	95,419	2.37	43.53	2.87	2.39	2.21	9.70	60.69
Population size	No. of parishes	Aggregate population	Paupers (including dependants)		Expenditure per pauper (£)					
			N	%	Maintenance	Medical relief	Buildings	Debt repayment	Other	Total
<500	114	39,193	777	1.98	9.55	0.93	0.14	0.01	3.15	13.78
500-999	204	151,881	3,864	2.54	8.57	0.91	0.11	0.05	2.09	11.72
1000-2499	304	501,598	13,888	2.77	8.12	0.76	0.09	0.04	1.70	10.72
2500-4999	124	441,436	11,727	2.66	7.49	0.54	0.10	0.05	1.70	9.88
5000-9999	79	549,821	12,608	2.29	7.46	0.39	0.11	0.07	1.65	9.67
10,000-19,999	37	499,147	11,266	2.26	7.59	0.34	0.17	0.09	1.45	9.64
20,000-49,999	13	411,813	8,927	2.17	7.51	0.34	0.35	0.19	1.67	10.07
≥50,000	10	1,430,758	32,362	2.26	7.49	0.47	0.95	0.99	1.75	11.65
Total	885	4,025,647	95,419	2.37	7.65	0.50	0.42	0.39	1.70	10.67

Source: Data derived from PP 1895 C. 7786 liii, 387, *First Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1894-5*, pp. 155-234.

<sup>50</sup> For Poor Law Unions, see PP 1901 Cd. 616 xc, 1, *Census of England and Wales, 1901. Preliminary report and tables of the population and houses enumerated in England and Wales and on the islands of the British Isles on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1901*, pp. 58-70.

As Crowther suggests, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the small size of the great majority of Scottish parishes was one of the factors militating against higher spending. In Scotland, this fact was aggravated by the fact that many of the smallest parishes had experienced significant levels of depopulation, leaving them with an impoverished population which lacked the resources for more generous provision.<sup>51</sup> The sheer number of parishes also created a degree of complexity which, in Crowther's words, 'reduced the effectiveness of central control'. However, she also noted that there was little pressure to address this. In 1872, the Chair of the Board of Supervision, William Walker, argued that 'the administration of the law is most efficient when the area and population are not so large as to make it beyond the power of one executive body to overlook it, and where all the paupers are within the knowledge, and under the constant oversight, of the inspector'.<sup>52</sup>

The Royal Commission on the Poor Laws focused specifically on parishes containing fewer than 500 inhabitants. It argued that the average rate of pauperism in these parishes (1.6 per cent) was significantly lower than the national average (2.4 per cent). The disparity was even greater after taking account of differences in the age structures of these parishes. The smallest parishes provided support for 1.23 per cent of children under the age of 14 and 2.81 per cent of people over the age of sixty. The equivalent figures for the country as a whole were 2.75 per cent and 6.33 per cent respectively.<sup>53</sup>

However, although these parishes were particularly parsimonious, there is little to suggest that size had a significant bearing on rates of pauperism in parishes above this threshold. Table 10 shows the relationship between pauperism and size

---

<sup>51</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Crowther, 'Poverty, health and welfare', pp. 272–3.

<sup>53</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 12; *ibid.*, *Appendix Volume VI. Minutes of Evidence (95 to 110<sup>th</sup> days and 139<sup>th</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> days) with Appendix*, pp. 858–9.

of parish in 1894/5, when rates of pauperism in neither the smallest parishes nor the country as a whole differed significantly from the figures analysed in the Royal Commission's report. Although the average rate of pauperism in parishes containing fewer than 500 inhabitants was only 1.98 per cent, there is little indication that rates of pauperism increased in accordance with the size of parishes above this point. Indeed, the parishes with the highest rates were those containing between 500 and 5000 inhabitants, and rates of pauperism were lower in the most populous parishes.

Table 10 also shows variations in expenditure in these parishes. Although the smallest parishes relieved a smaller proportion of their population, they spent more money on those who were relieved. After taking account of the number of paupers and the size of population, the authorities which spent the greatest amounts on both maintenance and medical relief were those containing between 500 and 2500 inhabitants. However, the largest authorities spent substantially more than other parishes on buildings and debt repayment. This reinforces Crowther's argument about the capacity of larger authorities to borrow the funds needed for large capital investments.

## V

One of the main differences between the Poor Law Amendment Act and the Poor Law (Scotland) Act concerned their respective attitudes to the role of institutions and their relationship to deterrence. The 1834 Act was framed by people who advocated the construction of 'well-regulated workhouses' to deter able-bodied people from claiming relief when out of work.<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the Poor Law (Scotland)

---

<sup>54</sup> PP 1834 (44) xxvii, 1, *Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for enquiring into the administration and practical operation of the Poor Laws*, p. 262.

Act reaffirmed the principle that ‘nothing herein contained shall ... confer a right to demand relief on able-bodied persons out of employment’.<sup>55</sup> By denying that the able-bodied poor had a right to relief in the first place, this appeared to remove the need for deterrence and allowed the Act’s supporters to focus on the promotion of poorhouses as institutional solutions to the needs of the most vulnerable.

The role played by institutions within Scottish Poor Law has continued to attract controversy. Chadwick bemoaned the failure of the Scottish Act to include the provision of deterrent workhouses and contrasted it unfavourably with the Act passed in Ireland seven years earlier.<sup>56</sup> Lamond took a rather different view. He described the Scottish poorhouse as ‘twin-sister to the English workhouse’ but this has been challenged by later historians.<sup>57</sup> Paterson argued that ‘Scottish institutions remained “poorhouses” and not “workhouses”’ and that ‘many inmates spent the day in idleness’.<sup>58</sup> Paterson and Englander also argued that ‘the provision of outdoor relief was much preferred by parochial boards’ and Paterson claimed that it was preferred by paupers also.<sup>59</sup>

Although both Paterson and Englander highlighted the Board of Supervision’s statistical limitations, we can nevertheless obtain a broad summary of the history of poorhouse provision. Table 11 suggests that, whilst a substantial proportion of parishes continued to lack their own poorhouse, the vast majority of Scots lived in parishes which had access to poorhouse provision from the late-1850s onwards. The percentage of people living in parishes with access to a poorhouse almost

---

<sup>55</sup> Poor Law (Scotland) Act, 1845, section 68.

<sup>56</sup> E. Chadwick, ‘Poor law administration: its chief principles and their results in England and Ireland as compared with Scotland’, *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, 27, 4 (1864), pp. 492–504, at p. 503.

<sup>57</sup> R.P. Lamond, *Scottish poor laws: their history, policy and operation* (Glasgow, 1892), p. 261.

<sup>58</sup> Paterson, ‘The Poor Law in nineteenth-century Scotland’, p. 187.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186; D. Englander, *Poverty and poor law reform in nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1998), p. 51.

doubled between 1848 and 1851, and again over the following decade. By the start of the 1880s, more than nine out of ten Scots lived in parishes with poorhouse access. However, the bald figures mask an important change in the role the poorhouse was expected to perform.

As we have already noted, the Poor Law (Scotland) Act in 1845 had been designed to improve the quality of poorhouse provision. In 1847, the Board of Supervision pointed out that ‘the sixtieth section of the Act declares it to be expedient that poorhouses should be erected in populous parishes for more effectually administering to the wants of aged and other friendless paupers, and of such as are unfit or unable to take charge of their own affairs’. It also rejected calls from some Highland parishes to make the construction of poorhouses conditional on the right to refuse relief to anyone who was not prepared to enter one.<sup>60</sup>

However, the influx of Irish migrants and the failure of the potato harvest provoked a rapid change of heart and, by 1848, the Board had already conceded that ‘in many parishes, which have not the required amount of population, and which cannot arrange a combination for that purpose with adjoining parishes, the erection of a poorhouse cannot be made the means of supplying accommodation for paupers’.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> *First Annual Report of the Board of Supervision*, pp. xlv–xlv.

<sup>61</sup> *Second Annual Report of the Board of Supervision*, pp. ii–vi.

*Table 11. Poorhouse accommodation in Scotland, 1848-1911*

	Number of poorhouses in operation	Sanctioned accommodation for the ordinary poor	Numbers of inmates as at 15 May	Number of parishes having poorhouses	Number of parishes having boarding rights	Numbers of parishes not having use of poorhouse	Population of parishes having poorhouse accommodation	Population of parishes not having poorhouse accommodation	% of population living in parishes with poorhouses
1848	14	3,193			14		548,745	2,071,471	20.94
1851	23	7,536	5,312	43	48	790	1,034,744	1,585,440	39.49
1861	39	11,688	7,031	188	233	462	2,067,985	820,757	71.59
1871	62	14,048	7,689	382	185	320	2,527,831	534,463	82.55
1881	63	15,027	9,040	432	227	227	3,394,917	340,656	90.88
1891	66	15,615	8,160	480	296	110	3,610,671	124,902	96.66
1901	65	15,467	10,306	483	319	73	4,430,809	41,294	99.08
1911	69	20,833	13,761	503	312	60	4,729,330	30,115	99.37

Sources: PP 1910 Cd. 4978 xlv, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume VI. Minutes of Evidence (95<sup>th</sup> to 110<sup>th</sup> days and 139<sup>th</sup> and 149<sup>th</sup> days) with Appendix*, p. 881; PP 1912 Cd. 6192 xxxvii, 431, *Seventeenth Annual Report of the Local Government Board for Scotland, 1911*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

The Board announced a further policy change in February 1850. It argued that 'so long as relief to the poor was looked upon, both by the givers and recipients, as the fulfilment of a charitable, rather than a legal, obligation, poorhouses were naturally regarded merely in the light of almshouses for the reception of the more deserving among the aged, infirm or friendless poor'. However, the poor now regarded the receipt of poor relief as a right rather than a form of charity and 'the[ir] altered feelings ... in regard to parochial relief, their more perfect knowledge of their rights and the facilities which the law now affords for enforcing those rights' necessitated a new approach. Although Chadwick subsequently bemoaned the failure to make the poorhouse more of a deterrent, the Board now advocated the introduction of a 'poorhouse test' to ensure that 'the funds raised for the relief of the poor are not perverted to maintenance of idleness and vice'.<sup>62</sup> The addition of a deterrent function to the traditional conception of a poorhouse increased the unattractiveness of poorhouse accommodation and meant that there was much less incentive to invest in it.<sup>63</sup>

The relationship between the cost of institutional provision, the number of people receiving indoor relief and the importance of poorhouses and workhouses as deterrents has long been the subject of controversy. However, as Williams pointed out, the fact that most paupers received outdoor relief did not diminish the significance of the workhouse as a deterrent.<sup>64</sup> The same point was also made in relation to Scottish poorhouses by the Head of the Statistical Branch of the Local Government Board for Scotland, John Maxwell, more than seventy years earlier:

I make no suggestion that excellent results are not obtained by the use of these houses, nor do I suggest that an empty poorhouse is necessarily indicative of

---

<sup>62</sup> PP 1851 (1294) xxxvi, 755, *Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Supervision for the Relief of the Poor in Scotland*, p. 1; see also A. Tindley, "Actual pinching and suffering": estate responses to poverty in Sutherland, 1845–86', *Scottish Historical Review*, 90, 2 (2011), pp. 236–56, at pp. 245–51.

<sup>63</sup> I. Levitt ed., *Government and social conditions in Scotland, 1845–1919* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. xxiii.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, *From pauperism to poverty*, pp. 81–90.

loss to the parishes supporting it. If properly used as a test ... the lack of inmates is profitable; but if, on the other hand, parishes have a poorhouse and do not use for testing purposes or for the aged and infirm, it is obviously a serious and needless expense.<sup>65</sup>

It may seem ironic to attribute the persistence of a gap in spending on Scottish poorhouses and English and Welsh workhouses to an apparent policy convergence. However, although the first Royal Commission on the Poor Laws had advocated the use of workhouses as a deterrent, many Poor Law Unions preferred to use an outdoor labour test.<sup>66</sup> This meant that they were then freer to develop their workhouses as institutions for the accommodation of the chronically-sick and elderly.<sup>67</sup> This was reflected in a sustained increase in workhouse expenditure per head of population in England and Wales from the mid-1860s onwards.<sup>68</sup>

## VI

As previous sections have shown, the Scottish Poor Law spent less money on poorhouses than the English Poor Law devoted to workhouses, and it also spent less on the elderly. These two issues were partly interrelated, insofar as a significant proportion of spending on poorhouses and workhouses was associated with the support of elderly residents. However, this was not a complete explanation, since the Scottish Poor Law also supported a smaller proportion of elderly people outside the poorhouse.

Loch argued that the difference between average rates of pauperism in Scotland and England and Wales was largely attributable to the differences in pauperism at

---

<sup>65</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 34; *ibid.*, *Appendix Volume VI*, p. 108.

<sup>66</sup> L.H. Lees, *The solidarities of strangers: the English Poor Laws and the people, 1700-1948* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 146.

<sup>67</sup> M.A. Crowther, *The workhouse system, 1834-1919: the history of an English social institution* (London, 1981), pp. 54-87.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, *From pauperism to poverty*, pp. 167-71.



higher ages. He argued that ‘the key ... lies probably in the relative pauperism of the two countries forty to fifty years ago. England has had to work their way out of a pauperism that did not exist in Scotland’. Scotland’s lower levels of old-age pauperism suggested that ‘the leaven of the older Scotch principles applied to the administration of relief has continued to work’.<sup>69</sup>

The Royal Commission on the Poor Laws echoed Loch’s view. It argued that the difference may have been partly attributable to the fact that ‘Scottish people are engaged in agriculture to a greater extent than in England and ... that persons so employed are able to carry on their occupation to a greater age’ and partly to the persistence of the crofting system in the Highlands and Islands, which enabled older people to remain in their crofts whilst their families carried on working, but neither explanation was sufficient. Other explanations, including ‘greater self-reliance and thrift’, ‘the aversion to apply for relief’ and ‘a more wholesome recognition of filial responsibilities’ lay beyond the reach of statistical explanation. The most likely explanation lay with the different ways in which the two systems had previously been administered:

Prior to 1845, the difficulty in regard to the administration of the Poor Laws in Scotland was to secure adequate relief for those entitled to it. In England ... the effort of the Legislature and administration was directed towards the prevention of unnecessary relief. Though this distinction has become less and less noticeable, it is probable that the lower rates of adult pauperism in Scotland are largely due to the character of the administration in former generations.<sup>70</sup>

Although the Royal Commission did not consider the significance of fiscal capacity directly, the evidence presented elsewhere in its Report suggests that this may also have been a factor. As we have already seen, the Commission was concerned about the viability of the poor relief system in many of the smallest parishes, and it recognised that these contained disproportionate numbers of

---

<sup>69</sup> Loch, ‘Poor relief in Scotland’, pp. 330–1.

<sup>70</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, pp. 31–2.

elderly people. It is therefore possible that one of the factors associated with lower rates of old-age pauperism was the fact that elderly people were more likely to reside in the parishes which were least able to support them.<sup>71</sup>

It is interesting to compare levels of old-age pauperism in Scotland with Boyer's analysis of the distribution of old-age pauperism across the English regions. As we can see from Table 12, he estimated that pauperism amongst those aged 65 and over ranged from 22.3 per cent in London and 22.7 per cent in eastern England to 15 per cent in the north-west, but all of these figures were significantly higher than their Scottish equivalents.

*Table 12. Pauperism in Scotland, Wales and English regions, 31 March 1906*

Registration Division	Pauperism rate (≥65 years)			% receiving indoor relief (≥60 years)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
London	21.8	22.7	22.3	78.4	45.4	59.1
South East	14.8	17.5	16.4	51.8	18.9	31.9
South Midlands	17.5	20.8	19.3	35.3	12.1	21.1
East	19.4	25.4	22.7	33.5	11.3	19.8
South West	15.4	22.1	19.3	28.0	9.8	15.8
West Midlands	17.8	20.7	19.4	44.3	15.5	27.1
North Midlands	18.8	23.7	21.5	30.8	8.3	17.3
North West	13.4	16.1	15.0	63.7	26.4	41.0
Yorkshire	14.0	17.2	15.8	45.7	15.4	27.3
North	14.1	18.3	16.3	45.7	14.0	26.8
Wales*	15.4	25.1	20.8	31.8	5.9	13.5
Scotland	8.7	13.6	11.7	42.5	13.6	22.2

Notes: \* Including Monmouthshire.

Sources: English regions: G. Boyer, 'Work for their prime, the workhouse for their age', *Social Science History*, 40 (1), pp. 3–32, at p. 9; Scotland: PP 1909 Cd. 4922 xxxviii, 95, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief and Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 24; Wales: PP 1911 Cd. 5077 liii, 1, Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Appendix Volume XXV. Statistics relating to England and Wales*, pp. 196–7; General Register Office, *Supplement to Registrar-General's seventy-fifth annual report. Part III. Registration summary tables, 1901–10* (London, 1919), pp. 88–113.

Although the Royal Commission thought that the lower rates of old-age pauperism in Scotland might have been partly attributable to the fact that the country had a higher proportion of workers employed in agriculture, it is difficult to reconcile this argument with Boyer's analysis of the pattern of variation within England. He accepted that it might be easier for agricultural workers to remain in

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

employment and maintain their existing wage levels between the ages of 55 and 70, but he also thought it was easier for workers over the age of seventy to obtain casual employment in urban areas. He also argued that industrial workers tended to enjoy higher lifetime earnings and that this enabled them to accumulate savings and contribute to friendly societies, both of which would have provided them with additional protection in old age.<sup>72</sup>

Boyer also considered the impact of migration on family support in both urban and rural areas. He argued that ‘children were more likely to assist their aged parents if they lived near them’ and that this was more likely to be the case in areas with low rates of out-migration. This might also have been expected to raise the demand for poor relief in Scotland’s rural districts.<sup>73</sup>

Boyer also examined the impact of poor law administration. He reported the results of a series of studies which appeared to show that, outside London, there was an inverse relationship between the proportion of elderly paupers residing in workhouses and the level of pauperism overall.<sup>74</sup> However, it is difficult to apply this explanation to Scotland. Table 12 shows that the proportion of paupers over the age of sixty who were relieved in Scottish poorhouses was lower than the equivalent figure in four of England’s ten regions (including London), even though the overall rate of pauperism was also lower.

---

<sup>72</sup> G. Boyer, “‘Work for their prime, the workhouse for their age’, *Social Science History*, 40 (1), pp. 3–32, at pp. 20–23. The value of friendly society statistics has often been debated. The data collected by the Royal Commission on Friendly Societies in 1874 suggest that the proportions of Scots who belonged to friendly societies or had savings accounts were higher than the equivalent figures for England and Wales and the Channel Islands, but the amounts invested were much lower. For membership details, see PP 1874 C. 961 xxiii, 1, *Fourth Report of the Royal Commission on Friendly and Benefit Building Societies*, p. 21; and, for population statistics, see B.R. Mitchell, *Abstract of British historical statistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, Table 1.3.

<sup>73</sup> Boyer, “‘Work for their prime’”, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24–6.

Although Boyer emphasised the importance of both economic and administrative factors, he also conceded that they were unable to explain all of the variation he observed. He therefore concluded that significant weight should also be attached to 'regional welfare cultures'.<sup>75</sup> He argued that many of the regional variations in poor relief which were observable in 1906 had also been apparent much earlier. He also noted that many of the elderly people who were eligible for poor relief in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries had grown up under the Old Poor Law, and speculated that the attitudes to poor relief which they had experienced during their youth remained with them throughout their lives.

Although it would be wrong to ignore the potential impact of cultural differences on variations in pauperism both within England and between Scotland and England and Wales, it is also important to recognise the extent to which people's attitudes can change. Many contemporaries thought that the introduction of the New Poor Law in Scotland led to a change in people's attitudes and Jones and King concluded that relationship between paupers and parish authorities in the Highland parish of Tongue 'changed markedly' after 1850.<sup>76</sup> They argued that 'far from the supplicatory and apologetic tone of petitions sent in the 1840s and [18]50s', the pauper letters of the 1880s 'demonstrate a keen sense of entitlement and a belief that the welfare of the Highland poor was not merely their own affair or that of their immediate kith and kin, but ... a matter of civic duty on the part of the parish as a whole'.<sup>77</sup> It is also important to emphasise that the 'workhouse test' was only one means of enforcing the principle of deterrence and that there are other ways of measuring the impact of deterrence in addition to the proportion of claimants

---

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26–7.

<sup>76</sup> P. Jones and S. King, 'Voices from the Far North: pauper letters and the provision of welfare in Sutherland, 1845–1900', *Journal of British Studies*, 55, 1 (2016), 76–98, at p. 76.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

relieved in workhouses. This was likely to have been just as true in Scotland as the English regions.

## VII

As the Royal Commission explained in 1909, the two Acts which shaped the development of poor relief in Scotland and England and Wales during the second half of the nineteenth century originated in quite different ways. The Poor Law Amendment Act was designed to limit access to poor relief and reduce poor law expenditure; the Poor Law (Scotland) Act was designed to improve the quality of poor law provision. However, despite these aims, significant differences in the administration of poor relief and patterns of expenditure persisted after 1845. This meant that the Scottish Poor Law continued to relieve a smaller proportion of the population and spend significantly less on the provision of relief.

This paper has sought to shed new light on the comparative history of the two Poor Laws by undertaking a more detailed investigation into both pauperism and expenditure. Although there was undoubtedly some convergence during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Scottish system continued to be more restrictive. This was especially apparent in relation to spending on older people and the provision of institutions.

The paper has also compared Scotland's experience with that of individual English regions. Boyer attributed variations in levels of old-age pauperism to differences in economic and demographic circumstances, administrative differences and 'regional welfare cultures'. So far as the latter were concerned, he argued that 'northerners were deemed to be more likely to have savings accounts and be

members of friendly societies than southerners, and attach a greater stigma to applying for poor relief'.<sup>78</sup>

Boyer's focus on 'character' echoed many contemporary views, including those of Charles Booth,<sup>79</sup> but this approach may fail to take account of the extent to which attitudes to the receipt of relief are also shaped by the way it is administered.<sup>80</sup> Boyer based his analysis of the importance of administration on the proportion of people receiving indoor relief but, as both John Maxwell and Karel Williams pointed out, a poorhouse (or workhouse) did not need to be occupied to act as a deterrent. We therefore need a broader conception of relief administration in order to gain a fuller understanding of the ways in which different approaches to the administration of poor relief shaped popular attitudes towards it.

The most visible indicators of differences in provision were related to the financing of poorhouses and the support of the elderly. It seems clear that Scotland under-invested in its poorhouses prior to 1914 and this meant that they were less able to provide the kinds of institutional support that the English Poor Law began to develop following investigations into workhouse conditions by the Poor Law Board and the *Lancet* in the mid-1860s.<sup>81</sup> The Scottish Poor Law also provided much less support for older people. This meant that, when the Old Age Pensions Act came into force on 1 January 1909, it had a much greater impact on the support of elderly people in Scotland than south of the border.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> Boyer, "Work for their prime", pp. 20–7.

<sup>79</sup> C. Booth, *The aged poor in England and Wales* (London, 1894), p. 24.

<sup>80</sup> B. Baumberg, 'The stigma of claiming benefits: a quantitative study', *Journal of Social Policy*, 45, 2 (2016), 181–99.

<sup>81</sup> Levitt, *Government and social conditions*, p. xxiii. For England and Wales, see Crowther, *The workhouse system*, p. 68, and B. Abel-Smith, *The hospitals, 1800-1948: a study in social administration in England and Wales* (London, 1964), pp. 50–7.

<sup>82</sup> Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and Relief of Distress, *Report on Scotland*, p. 32.

Some modern commentators have argued that Scotland possesses a distinctive social welfare tradition which differentiates it from the rest of the UK, but the reality of this tradition is more complex. Although Thomas Chalmers may have lost the initial battle over the reform of the Poor Law in 1845, he cast a long shadow over the development of poor law policy for much of the nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> However, as Jones and King have shown, there was also growing evidence of a change in popular attitudes and, during the early years of the twentieth century, this began to be shared by policy-makers and opinion-formers.<sup>84</sup> This was reflected in the development of more liberal attitudes to the provision of social welfare on both sides of the border in the period leading to the introduction of the Liberal welfare reforms of 1906–11.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> See also Crowther, 'Poverty, health and welfare', p. 268.

<sup>84</sup> I. Levitt, *Poverty and welfare in Scotland, 1890-1948* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 44–103.

<sup>85</sup> J. Stewart, "'This injurious measure': Scotland and the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act", *Scottish Historical Review*, 78, 1 (1999), pp. 76–94; *ibid.*, "'Christ's Kingdom in Scotland": Scottish Presbyterianism, social reform and the Edwardian crisis', *Twentieth Century British History*, 12, 1 (2001), 1–22.